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## **Find home for hygiene center elsewhere**

We urge the mayor and the City Council to realize that the last thing Chinatown/International District needs is a hygiene center for the homeless.

This neighborhood is already a magnet for drug dealers, vagrants, prostitutes and crime. Many of our elderly residents are afraid to walk on the streets at night for fear of being hassled, robbed or worse. Business owners have problems attracting customers. Few families make their homes here because they don't think it's a good place to raise children. Few neighborhoods in Seattle are as discouraging for families as this one.

For years, community advocates have been working hard to make Chinatown/I.D. a friendly place for families, businesses, customers and tourists. They've made noticeable progress. The streets are cleaner and better lit than they were 10 years ago, and developers are slowly realizing the benefits of investing in this area. But the No. 1 issue in this neighborhood is still public safety. The city and the community must work in tandem to make Chinatown/I.D. a place where people want to live, work and play.

It doesn't appear that Mayor Greg Nickels is willing to do that, given his plan to locate a men's hygiene center at Fourth and Yesler.

Situating a service center for homeless men in Chinatown/I.D. would result in a major step back for this community. The homeless population would have yet another reason to flock to this neighborhood. Business people, families and tourists would feel they have another reason to stay away. Community activists would feel like they were slapped in the face. Years of promises by the mayor to significantly increase housing in the area would be thrown in the trash.

Halfway houses, shelters, transitional housing and other services for homeless people should be scattered throughout the downtown area and other parts of the city.

We are not saying the city should not build a place where the homeless can shower and wash their clothes. We support programs that help the homeless get back on their feet again. But we don't believe it is wise to concentrate

such programs and services in one area of the city. Both Chinatown/I.D. and nearby Pioneer Square are shouldering the responsibility of feeding programs and shelters — much more so than other parts of Seattle. That's just not fair. Why should Chinatown/I.D. and Pioneer Square be subject to extra burdens while the rest of the city prospers?

Upon hearing of the mayor's proposal, City Councilman Tom Rasmussen, who is chair of the human-services committee, requested and was given time to seek out alternatives to that plan. That search yielded two more choices. One is the Morrison Hotel in Pioneer Square, a homeless facility that is run by the Downtown Emergency Services Center. The other is in the Belltown community center that is being developed at First and Wall; the Low Income Housing Institute says a hygiene facility could be built on the first floor. Kudos to Rasmussen for giving the city options. The City Council will be better informed when it gathers on Feb. 28 to vote on the location of the hygiene center.

If either the Morrison Hotel or the Fourth and Yesler site is chosen, the council must make sure that funds and resources are set aside to mitigate the effects of the homeless service center. Extra officers, more security cameras and better street lighting are some of things the city can provide.

We urge the council to take into consideration the needs of this delicate community when voting. Chinatown/I.D. already has its hands full of problems. A homeless service center would exacerbate the troubles.